



Jordanians Find Entrepreneurial Inspiration

Challenge

Entrepreneurs, and the businesses they create, are key to a country's economic health. In Jordan, however, starting a business is widely perceived to be complex and risky, and often considered only as a last resort. More than three-quarters of Jordanians think starting a business is difficult, according to a 2002 USAID survey, which listed lack of money and business knowledge as the biggest obstacles. The survey also revealed that people were largely unaware of the financial assistance and services available to aspiring entrepreneurs.



Photo: Mahmoud Shawkat

The forums use an innovative interactive play to encourage people to start businesses.

“I knew about flower arranging, but not how to start a business or get funding. The forum was very enlightening and educational. I found a company that helped me do a feasibility study, and an institution that gave me a \$700 loan. I started my business in my home, and I’m doing well.”

- Sana Johar, attendee

Initiative

To inspire would-be entrepreneurs, USAID developed Entrepreneur Forums, which are held throughout Jordan. Showcasing successful entrepreneurs as role models, these events connect aspiring entrepreneurs with financial institutions and companies that provide business development assistance.

Entrepreneur Forums also feature an innovative, interactive stageplay that asks the audience to convince Firas—an unemployed young man whose wife is pregnant with their first child—to start his own business. Lacking self esteem and confidence, Firas initially rejects the idea. But with proper motivation from the audience and his ‘stage’ family, Firas begins to see entrepreneurship as the way to secure his financial future. The play complements information offered at the forums, encouraging current and future business owners to consider their potential and to recognize and capitalize on the resources that can help them.

Results

For most attendees at a March 2004 forum, the event gave them their first encounter with business development assistance. The play was well-received; nearly two-thirds of the participants said they could relate to the characters’ feelings about starting a business. Nearly 80 percent of participants said they felt motivated to start or expand their own businesses—and, within a month of the event, more than 40 percent had actually taken steps to do so.